

**FROM VICTIM TO VICTORY: THE EXPERIENCES OF ABUSED WOMEN
AND THE SALIENCE OF THE SUPPORT THEY ENCOUNTER.**

by

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In loving memory of my son

Ruben

9 January 2005

1 Chronicles 5: 1-2

The family of Reuben the firstborn of Israel: Though Reuben was Israel's firstborn ...
his rights as the firstborn were passed on to the sons of Joseph son of Israel. He lost
his "firstborn" place in the family tree.

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SUMMARY

This thesis includes four studies investigating the experiences of abused women. According to ecological approaches different systems should be considered when conducting research into abused women and their experiences.

The first study involved women who successfully left an abusive relationship. An ecological approach was used to investigate the experiences of the women in the different phases of their relationship, including the initial attraction to the partner, the development and sustaining of the abuse and her attempts to leave until her final decision to leave permanently. An important finding was the importance of considering and investigating all systems and levels when dealing with abused women, including those who have left and those who are contemplating leaving this relationship.

The second study found that women who experienced physical abuse were often hurt in anatomical locations that were indicative of impulsive violence. The abuser used any object in the heat of the moment to attack the victim and no premeditated planning was evident in the type of injuries sustained. The women further reported that medical practitioners did not investigate the causes of injuries and that they were not referred to social services or organisations dealing with abused women, although they were recognised as suffering from abuse.

The intersection of abuse of women and HIV was the topic of focus of the third study. A review of the records of abused women revealed that many abused women were subjected to risk factors for contracting HIV, with counsellors focussing only on abuse issues. Longitudinal case studies, of women exposed to both conditions, revealed that they lacked social support and were often secondarily victimised by the social welfare systems. An environmental scan found that social and health care services were not accessible to these women.

The final study investigated intervention strategies to combat burnout in workers at an organisation dealing with abused women. The importance and effectiveness of creative exercises and art sessions were determined in combination with debriefing and supervision sessions.

The studies all considered systems that are important in service delivery to abused women. A holistic and systemic investigation and treatment of abused women is shown to be essential, as is the importance of grass roots research.

Keywords:

Gender Based Violence, Women Abuse, Battering, Domestic Violence, Interpersonal violence, Resilience, Social support, Ecological Approach.

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